

(Washington, DC) Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) joined Representatives Al Green (D-TX) and Mike Turner (R-OH) in hosting a Congressional staff briefing entitled "Fair Housing, Unfair Practices II: Recent Trends in Housing Discrimination." It is the second staff briefing Hastings has hosted this year to discuss emerging fair housing concerns, particularly those surrounding ways in which banks are maintaining and selling foreclosed homes. Panelists at today's briefing included: Shanna Smith, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Fair Housing Alliance; Sara Pratt, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Enforcement and Program, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity; and Aracely Panameno, Director of Latino Affairs, Center for Responsible Lending.

"I am thrilled to see so many people passionate about eradicating housing discrimination, as it is up to us to ensure all citizens are given the opportunity to truly live the 'American Dream'—to own a home and live in a neighborhood of his or her choice—completely free of discrimination," said Hastings.

"Housing discrimination is not just an issue that affects minorities, it affects everyone. Women with children, veterans, elderly persons, and other exploited groups have all been subject to discriminatory treatment in housing," further noted Hastings. "Unfortunately, the current housing crisis has exacerbated the prevalence of housing discrimination. Stable housing is thus a dream delayed rather than achieved as our nation struggles to regroup from the worst housing crisis in decades."

In February of this year, the U.S. housing market began experiencing its largest decline in 27 years. Right now, 11 percent of all homes in the U.S. are currently standing empty. Similarly, 19 percent of homes in Florida are sitting vacant. That number is 63 percent higher than it was just ten years ago.

At the end of 2010, 23 percent of all U.S. homeowners with a mortgage owed more on their homes than their homes were worth. In 1996, 89 percent of Americans believed that it was better to own a home than to rent one. Today, that number has fallen to 63 percent. An all-time record of 2.87 million U.S. households received a foreclosure filing in 2010.

"As a representative from South Florida, it pains me to see that our region is by far one of the hardest hit in the country, with the burden of the foreclosure crisis falling most heavily on

minority communities," said Hastings. "There were nearly 3,000 foreclosure cases filed in Palm Beach County alone between 2010 and 2011. It is clear that the housing crisis still plagues the foundation and structure of our communities.

"As more people lose their homes and begin to return to the rental market, they are faced with the hardships of fair housing violations," Hastings continued. "Lending and housing discrimination practices exacerbate segregation, injustice, and the kind of homogeneity that breeds stagnation, and there is simply no room for such qualities in the strong communities we envision for the future.

"I encourage everyone to continue to fight against injustices, like housing discrimination, which plague our society. Discrimination is a disease that will continue to spread unless we actively seek to cure it."

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings serves as Senior Member of the House Rules Committee, Ranking Democratic Member of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and Democratic Chairman of the Florida Delegation.

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